

December 1, 1997 Project Update

Purpose of this update

The purpose of this update is to provide the interested public with current information about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program. This update is being prepared in cooperation with the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD). Please note: if you were previously on the AGFD's Mexican Wolf mailing list, that list has now been combined with the Service's Mexican Wolf mailing list.

Recent program activities and decisions

Release Pen Construction Initiated on Apache National Forest

Work continues on the three Mexican wolf release pen sites designated for use in 1998. These sites, known as the Campbell Blue, Hawk's Nest, and Turkey Creek sites (see maps attached), are all on the Apache National Forest in eastern Arizona. The Campbell Blue and Hawk's Nest pens are nearly complete. The Turkey Creek release pen will be completed in December. The Service would like to acknowledge the cooperation of AGFD, U.S. Forest Service - Apache National Forest, Julian Wolf Preserve, Student Conservation Association-AmeriCorps, Round River Conservation Studies, Prescott College, Preserve Arizona's Wolves, and other volunteers who have assisted with pen construction.

Prior to beginning pen construction, the Service prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) on its proposal to build the 1/3rd acre, chain-link fence pens on up to seven designated potential release sites. The four additional sites that are not built on in 1997, i.e., Crow Poison, Engineer Spring, Pace Creek, and XXX Ranch (see maps), are designated as potential future release pen sites to utilize as needed during the Mexican wolf reintroduction effort. Three alternative actions were considered in the EA: (1) Alternative A - (Proposed Action): Release Pens with Limited Restrictions on Public Access and Disturbance-Causing Land Uses; (2) Alternative B: Release Pens Only with No Restrictions; and (3) Alternative C: No Action. The Service Regional Director's November 3 decision approved the Proposed Action and Preferred Alternative, Alternative A - the construction of Mexican wolf release pens in the Apache National Forest, Arizona, with limited restrictions on public access and disturbance-causing land uses. These limited temporary restrictions, described in the proposed Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Rule, will occur through orders issued by the Apache National Forest. They will only apply within a 1-mile radius around occupied release pens. The wolves will acclimate in the pens for up to several months before release. The restrictions will not limit access to any private land or to any ongoing land uses, and have been carefully tailored to avoid significant impacts while protecting the wolves from disturbance.

The process of selecting the release pen sites involved extensive public input. On August 6, 1997, the Service sent an information letter to approximately 1,300 interested or potentially affected members of the public and issued a news release requesting input on the seven candidate release pen sites by August 19, 1997. Thirty-five responses were received from individuals and 12 responses from organizations. (A summary of the comments and the Service's responses to them is available, see Information Materials section below). Many potentially affected people were met with directly. Through this process and additional discussions with the site selection team, the former Campbell Flats site was dropped because a suitable pen site could not be located and the former Hannagan Meadows Heliport site was dropped due to the likely disturbance of wolves and possible recreational use conflicts. Two additional sites, Engineer Spring and Campbell Blue, were designated.

Interagency coordination

Invitations have been sent to affected agencies, tribes, and local governments to designate a representative to serve on the Interagency Management Group (IMG) to advise the Service on the reintroduction. The IMG will: (1) Help develop and review the annual Interagency Mexican Wolf Management Plan; (2) evaluate and improve interagency cooperation; (3) advise the Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader on issues related to the reintroduction; and (4) provide a forum to consider input of any related information, including citizen concerns. Invitations were sent to AGFD; New Mexico Department of Game and Fish; Apache National Forest; Gila National Forest; San Carlos Apache Tribe; White Mountain Apache Tribe; USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services; Apache and Greenlee Counties of Arizona; and Catron, Grant, and Sierra Counties of New Mexico.

Extensive cooperation has occurred to date between the Service and AGFD. The initial releases will take place in Arizona and AGFD will have much of the responsibility for implementation in Arizona. Dan Groebner of the AGFD Pinetop Regional Office has been designated the Department's primary point of contact.

David Parsons attended the meeting of the New Mexico Game and Fish Commission on November 20. The Commission's action regarding the New Mexico Game and Fish Department's involvement left room for future interagency cooperation with regard to the management of re-established wolves and related outreach activities.

On October 17, White Mountain Apache Tribal Chairman Ronnie Lupe and Tribal Attorney Robert C. Brauchli visited the Service's Mexican Wolf Management Facility and met with Service staff and managers at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge. Avenues for cooperative involvement by the tribes continue to be explored.

Under an interagency agreement between the Service and the USDA Wildlife Services agency (formerly Animal Damage Control), Alan Armistead has been selected as the Wolf Management Specialist for the Mexican wolf project. He will be a member of the field management team and will be responsible for investigating livestock depredation

incidents, to determine if wolves were involved, and will assist with other management and outreach activities. This position is similar to the position held by Carter Neimeyer in the northern Rocky Mountain region.

Outreach: Project personnel provided presentations on the wolf recovery program to the:

- Grant County Cattlegrowers in Silver City, New Mexico
- Gila, New Mexico Community Center
- Truth or Consequences, New Mexico High School Biology Club
- Pinetop-Lakeside Presbyterian Community Church
- Albuquerque Unitarian Fellowship
- UNM Mammalian Ecology Class

Other activities

The revised Mexican Wolf Experimental Population Rule has been approved by the Service's Regional Director and is now in the Washington Office for final approval.

The Service advertised two 5½-month temporary biological technician positions to provide field assistance with the reintroduction phase. The announcement opened December 1 for 2 weeks. These positions will be filled as soon as possible.

The AGFD's Wolf Specialist position was opened for applications on October 22 with an application deadline of November 21.

Interviews will take place in December, with a hiring decision expected in January.

Brown participated in field training on wolf trapping and depredation investigation in Minnesota in October.

Time line for reintroduction activities

December 1997

- Finish constructing release pens

Publish final rule for the nonessential experimental population

- Assemble field management team

January - February 1998

- Final evaluation and selection of release candidate wolves
- Convene interagency management group and draft interagency management plan
- Complete final public interaction plan
- Wolves moved to release pens and held for approximately 8 weeks*

March - May 1998

- Wolves released from pens; monitoring begins*

*An adaptive management strategy (meaning that agencies will use emerging current information to make the best possible decisions) will be used for this and other processes in the wolf reintroduction effort. The exact time when wolves will enter, be held, or be released from pens will be decided based upon the best judgment of the management team and may vary for each release site.

Comments Requested on Draft Public Interaction Plan

Attached is a [summary of the Public Interaction Plan](#) that the Service and cooperating agencies will use to guide outreach activities during the reintroduction efforts. Public comments on this draft are requested by January 23, 1998. The plan will then be finalized and implementation will begin.

Captive population update

The current captive population of Mexican wolves has 176 individuals.

Ten captive Mexican wolves were transferred from the U.S. to Mexico and two from Mexico to the U.S. at the

El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border on November 19. Colleen Buchanan, the Service's Sevilleta Wolf Facility Manager, coordinated the transfers. The transfers were recommended by the Species Survival Plan Management Group to enhance captive breeding efforts in both the United States and Mexico.

Partnerships

Bobbie Holaday, Executive Director of Preserve Arizona's Wolves (PAWS), donated 50 copies of *Wolves: Elementary Curriculum Guide* (developed by Wolf Haven International with input from PAWS specific to the Mexican wolf) and 100 brochures to the Pinetop office of the Arizona Game and Fish Department for use in education and outreach efforts in the reintroduction area. If interested in receiving these, contact: Arizona Game and Fish Department, HC 66, Box 57201, Pinetop, AZ 85935. Tel: (520) 367-4281.

The International Wolf Center (IWC) and the Service have established links between their web sites. The links will provide current information about the Mexican wolf and access to a larger context of information about the wolf throughout the world. The IWC's site can be accessed at:

<http://www.wolf.org>

The Turner Endangered Species Fund has constructed a captive wolf management facility similar to the Service's Sevilleta facility on the Ladder Ranch near Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. The first wolves to occupy the Ladder Ranch facility arrived on December 5. Eventually, five pairs or family groups of wolves will be held there. Wolves held at the Ladder Ranch facility will be candidates for future releases or wolves returned to captivity from the wild following reintroduction. No releases are planned on the Ladder Ranch.

New or updated information materials available upon request from the FWS

- **CORRECTION.** We apologize for the misprint in our web site address in the last Update. However, we have a new address: <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/wolf>
- *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Mexican Wolf Home Page.* **Many of our materials are now available through the Internet.** Contact us at: <http://ifw2es.fws.gov/wolf>
- *Environmental Assessment for the Construction of Mexican Wolf Release Pens in the Apache National Forest, Arizona* (18 pages)
- *Summary of Public Comments on Mexican Wolf Soft Release Pens Site Selection, With Fish and Wildlife Service Responses* (10 pages)
- *Mexican Wolf Recovery in the Southwest* (1 page)
- *Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Mexican Wolf Reintroduction in the Southwest* (8 pages)
- *Kids Fact Sheet on the Mexican Wolf* (4 pages)

Please contact us if you want to receive any of these materials. We also welcome your ideas about our written communications, our outreach efforts generally, and any specific suggestions you have about how to improve the Project Update. Write:

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